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DRAFT SCENIC HIGHWAYS ELEMENT
OF THE
SACRAMENTO COUNTY GENERAL PLAN

County planning Sacramento co.
Highways
" Parkway "

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BACKGROUND

This document is designed to meet the legislative requirement, adopted in 1972, that counties and cities adopt a Scenic Highway Element as part of their General Plans (Section 65302 (h) of the Government Code). This legislation states:

The plan shall include the following elements: ... (h) A scenic highway element for the development, establishment, and protection of scenic highways pursuant to the provisions of Article 2.5 (commencing with Section 260) of Chapter 2 of Division 1 of the Streets and Highways Code.

As outlined in the State Guideline for preparation of the Scenic Highways Element its primary purpose is to take initial steps toward protection of the scenic values of routes in the California Master Plan of State Highways Eligible for Official Scenic Highway Designation. (1) This Master Plan maps a limited number of notably beautiful State Highways with the aim of encouraging local governments to protect their visual corridors. Sacramento County has one State Highway which appears on this Master Plan, the River Road. The County has taken steps to protect this highway sufficient to secure its designation as an official State Scenic Highway, but, as discussed below, additional steps should be taken.

The State Guidelines for preparation of the Scenic Highways Element state that secondarily the element may develop policies concerning local scenic routes. Such policies are also included in this element.

The purpose of protecting and enhancing the beauty of scenic routes is to create a more pleasant visual environment for the traveler. Preserving visual amenities is a well accepted planning goal. It appears in the Conservation Element of the County General Plan (2) as Goal (F):

To promote recreational facilities of all types and to protect and enhance the natural scenic features of the County assuring that pleasing or attractive visual aesthetics are maintained. (p. 6)

The Conservation Element mentions in particular the importance of development of scenic routes.

While it is unquestionably desirable that roadways be aesthetic, other considerations must enter into decisions affecting the County's roads. Two considerations, in particular, are the energy shortage and the air pollution problem in the Sacramento Air Basin. Currently, this Country is suffering from an energy shortage. Most experts predict that the shortage will continue through the next decade with occasional crisis episodes. This shortage could cause severe economic dislocations similar to ones experienced in 1973 unless the public and industry practice energy conservation. Reducing auto mileage is an effective way to conserve energy. Local governments should encourage this form of conservation.

A second consideration which should affect decisions concerning roadways is air pollution problems of this Air Basin. The Sacramento Air Basin has been named by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as one of the nine critical air pollution areas in the State. Transportation Control Strategies proposed by the EPA would require severe cutbacks of vehicle miles traveled within the Basin in order to meet the 1977 Federal Clean Air Standards. No specific set of Transportation Control Strategies for the Basin has been adopted yet. However, it is clear that adequate reduction of air pollution problems in the Basin will require minimization of auto mileage in the County. The County should support this measure.

The goal of reducing vehicle miles traveled in order to conserve energy and reduce air pollution problems could, in some cases, conflict with the

goal of enhancing the scenic values of roadways. Many people like to take a drive as a form of recreation. The expenditure of public funds to beautify roadways or publicize them would encourage this pastime. On the other hand, no one would suggest that the County should "uglify" its roads in order to discourage pleasure driving. This element attempts to strike a balance between the goal of scenic preservation and that of minimizing vehicle miles traveled.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: To preserve and enhance the aesthetic quality of scenic roads without encouraging unnecessary driving.

Objective (1): To retain designation of the River Road (State Highways 160 and 84) as an Official State Scenic Highway and to preserve and enhance its scenic qualities.

Objective (2): To take necessary steps to preserve and enhance the scenic qualities of the Garden Highway.

Objective (3): To extend County scenic corridor protection to additional specific scenic roads in the rural portions of the County.

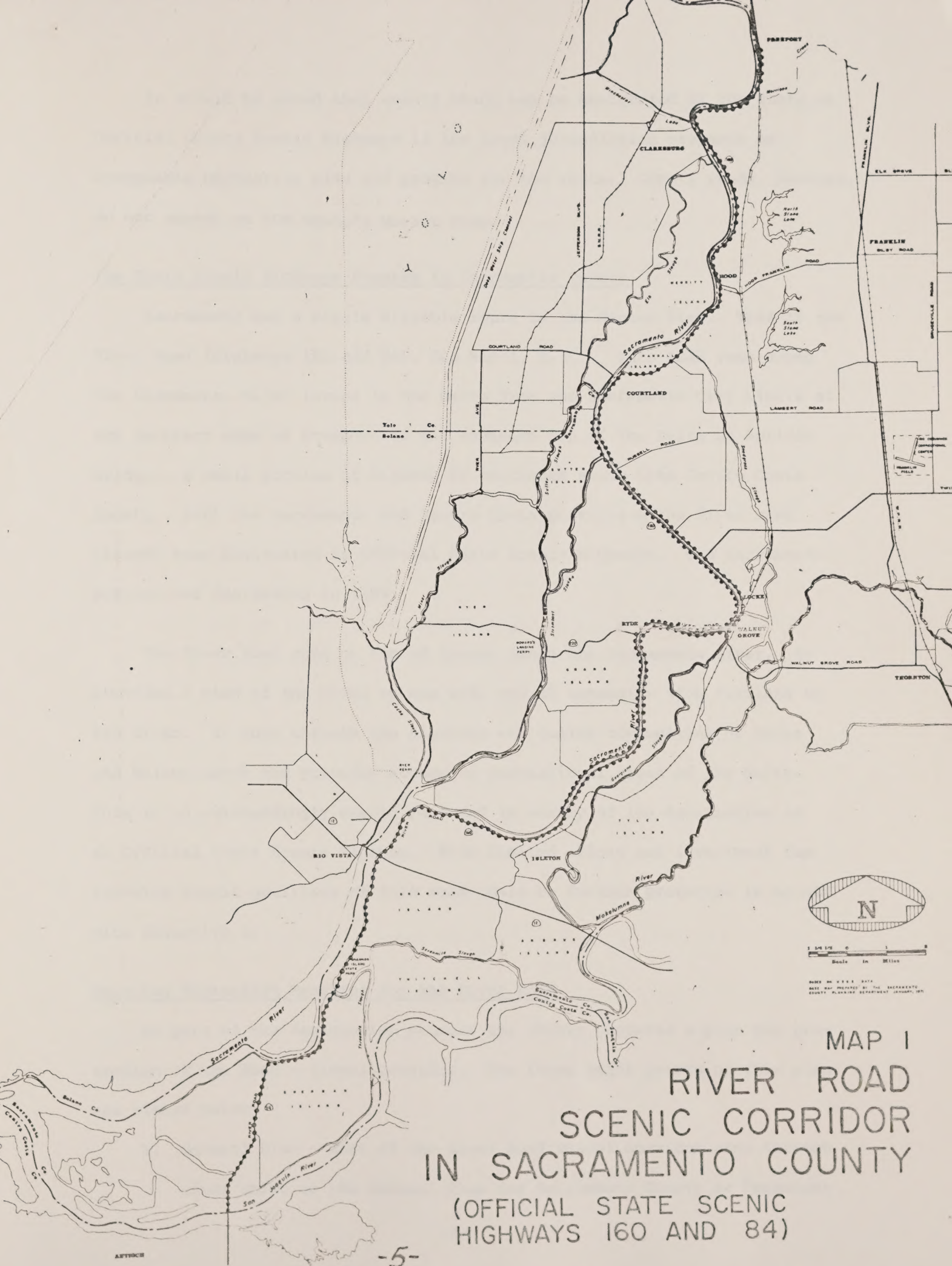
Objective (4): To strengthen the provisions of scenic corridor regulations so as to further protect the aesthetic values of the County's freeways and scenic roads.

Objective (5): To place a low priority on facilitation of pleasure auto driving and to encourage use of other modes of transportation.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STATE SCENIC HIGHWAYS PROGRAM

The requirement for a Scenic Highway Element is primarily designed to encourage local jurisdictions to implement the State Scenic Highways Program. The program is outlined in Sections 260-263.1 in the California Streets and Highways Code and in the California Department of Transportation publication A Guide for the Official Designation of Eligible Scenic Highways.

In order to be designated as a State Scenic Highway, the highway must be included in the State Master Plan of Highways Eligible for Official Scenic Highway Designation. This Master Plan comprises a limited number of truly scenic highways. Roads may be added to the Master Plan only by an act of the Legislature. Designation of the eligible highways as Official State Highways can occur after the State has accepted a local plan to protect the visual corridor of the highway.



MAP 1
 RIVER ROAD
 SCENIC CORRIDOR
 IN SACRAMENTO COUNTY
 (OFFICIAL STATE SCENIC
 HIGHWAYS 160 AND 84)



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It should be noted that county roads may be designated by the State as Official County Scenic Highways if the local jurisdiction prepares an acceptable protective plan and program for the route. County roads, however, do not appear on the State's Master Plan.

The State Scenic Highways Program in Sacramento County

Sacramento has a single eligible route in the Master Plan. This is the River Road (Highways 160 and 84), See Map 1, p. 5. This Road runs along the Sacramento River levees in the Delta from the Sacramento City Limits at the northern edge of Freeport to the southern tip of the Delta at Antioch Bridge. A small portion of Highway 84 continues south into Contra Costa County. Both the Sacramento and Contra Costa portions of the River have already been designated as Official State Scenic Highways. The Sacramento portion was designated in 1969.

The River Road runs on top of levees along the Sacramento River. It provides a view of the river on one side and of extensive rich farmland on the other. It runs through the historic and quaint communities of Locke and Walnut Grove and provides access to recreational areas of the Delta. This is an outstandingly scenic road and is worthy of its designation as an Official State Scenic Highway. With limited effort and investment the existing scenic qualities of this road could be further protected in accord with Objective 1.

Existing Protective Measures for the River Road

As part of the designation process the County prepared a plan for protection of the Road's visual corridor. The three major points of this plan are listed below:

1. General Plan - Most of the River Road visual corridor runs through areas shown on the General Plan for Sacramento County as Permanent

Agriculture and immediately along the River, as Recreational. Where the Road runs through the small Delta communities, the planned land uses are urban. The Agricultural and Recreational designations provide a good degree of protection against commercial, industrial, and residential land development which may be unaesthetic; but, through the small towns there is no such protection.

2. Zoning - The zoning in the River Road visual corridor is largely agricultural (A-10, AG-20, and AG-80) with spots of recreational and commercial recreational zoning (O and CO respectively). In the small communities the usual residential, commercial, and industrial zoning occurs, again providing no visual protection against urban development which may be unaesthetic.
3. Sign Control - Special sign control measures are provided within the river courses and sloughs of the Delta and 500 feet landward of the center line of scenic routes, of which the River Road is one (See Section 23.18.356, 23.16.013, and 23.16.014 of the Sacramento County Zoning Code). Within 500 feet of the Road, no off-site signs are permitted except in "approved directional groups." Approved directional groups are selected sites at which a number of signs are placed to direct the traveler to commercial, industrial, recreational, and other facilities. The signs in these groups require a permit and are regulated as to size and type.

Limited types of on-site signs are allowed in the Scenic Corridor. No permit is needed for on-site signs. These sign provisions apply to all other scenic corridors in the County in addition to that of the River Road.

In summary, presently, the River Road is protected by the General Plan,

zoning, and the scenic corridor sign control regulations.

Problems of the River Road Visual Corridor

1. The small communities of the Delta through which the River Road travels are developing without design controls leaving a potential for unaesthetic development. In addition, the historic town, Locke, has little protection against destruction by fire or by demolition for new construction. Locke is a point of historic interest on the Road and should be preserved.
2. Sign control within the visual corridor is insufficient. There is no design control of on-site signs and insufficient enforcement of the prohibition of off-site signs. On a recent tour of the Road, six to eight off-site signs and as many as one hundred typical commercial on-site signs inappropriate to the scenic qualities of the Road were spotted within 500 feet of the road.
3. Along most of the road the levees are stripped of vegetation on the sides and in many parts are riprapped with rock. The beauty of those stretches with natural vegetation contrasts sharply with the stark stretches of bare levee. This problem is noted in a variety of sources: The State Corridor Survey, the State's Delta Master Recreation Plan (3), the Preliminary Delta Area Planning Council Plan (4), and a resolution of the State legislature (5). Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 151 of July 10, 1969 states in part:

"It has become increasingly recognized that preservation of natural beauty, shade and wildlife habitat on the levees is important from a recreational and aesthetic view point...."

This is the major visual problem of the River Road and other Delta Roads.

Stripping of levees is done for flood control reasons. However, there is considerable controversy as to whether the extensive stripping now done on the levees is needed. Levee stripping is required on Corps of Engineers levees by Federal regulation and is enforced by the State Board of Reclamation. The levees that the River Road is located on are Corps levees.

4. There are insufficient places to stop along the River Road for picnics, fishing, boating and other recreations. This problem, common to all the Delta roads is noted by the Delta Master Recreation Plan (1973):

In addition to access sites needed for parking and launching boats and as boater destination sites as described earlier in this chapter, additional access and parking sites are sorely needed for fishermen, picnickers, and sightseers. These can be provided at selected locations particularly along the levee berms on the waterside of the levees.

Development of small access sites with minimal facilities can provide benefits not only to the recreationist but also the Delta landowner and to the general public. Trespass on private lands in other nearby locations with resulting trash, litter and petty theft problems could be reduced. This could be accomplished by providing sanitary facilities, litter cleanup and generally controlling activities in the access areas. For these reasons, federal, state, and local agencies should increase their efforts to provide, operate, and maintain small access and parking sites at strategic locations in the Delta. (pp. IV 21-23)

Design review, especially in the small Delta communities along the road, stronger sign control and enforcement, protection of levee vegetation, and provision of additional pull-outs and picnic areas would better protect and enhance the corridor.

OTHER ROADS PROTECTED BY SCENIC CORRIDOR DESIGNATIONS

There are a number of County roads, that have scenic qualities and are protected by scenic corridor designations. These are briefly discussed below.

The Garden Highway:

The Garden Highway runs along the crown of the Sacramento River levee from the Sacramento City limits north to the Placer County line. As one drives along this narrow two lane road, one sees wide expanses of rich farm land to the landward side and catches glimpses of the river through thick vegetation on the water side. Many houses are located on the river side of the levee. However, it is probable that little new construction will occur in the future on the river side of the levee due to provisions of the new Federal Flood Insurance regulations. Existing houses are usually well screened by domestic gardens, giving the road a quiet residential atmosphere. The road is a pleasant and interesting one.

The General Plan shows the northern two thirds of the highway as Permanent Agriculture and the southern third as Agricultural-Urban Reserve. Immediately along the river, the planned land use is recreation. The agricultural and recreational designations provide adequate scenic preservation, however, the Agricultural-Urban Reserve designation will allow eventual urbanization. The zoning is largely Agricultural on the landward side, AG-20 with areas of AG-80, A-10, and A-2. It is residential and recreational on the river side. The scenic corridor extends to the middle of the Sacramento River on the river side and 500 feet on the landward side. This corridor provides the sign control protection discussed above.

MAP 2
GARDEN HIGHWAY
SCENIC CORRIDOR



The Streams, Sloughs, and Channels of the Delta:

A number of County roads run on the crowns of levees along the rivers and sloughs of the Delta. These are narrow roads which give a near view of the water and far views of fields on both sides. The roads are used to give access to the Delta, including recreational access. Like the River Road these roads are protected by the General Plan designation of Permanent Agriculture and by agricultural zoning. They are also protected by scenic corridor sign controls.

Other Scenic Corridors on County Roads and Rivers:

The following additional County roads are protected by scenic corridor sign controls:

Isleton Road

Greenback Lane Extension Freeway

The Watt Avenue Freeway from Folsom
Boulevard on the south to eight hundred
seventy (870) feet south of Fair Oaks
Boulevard on the north.

In addition, the Sacramento and American Rivers are protected within Sacramento County by scenic corridors extending 500 feet to each side of the river, as measured from the middle of the channel or by a minimum of a corridor 300 feet from the edge of the rivers.

Scenic Corridor Protection of the Freeways:

The freeways are heavily traveled commuter routes in the County, but for the most part are not particularly scenic. These routes are mostly used for necessary travel rather than for pleasure driving. Beautifying the freeways makes that travel pleasanter and creates a more attractive image of the urban area of Sacramento.

Currently the freeways are protected by scenic corridors which extend 660 feet to each side beyond the right-of-way. Some stretches of freeway are landscaped, including notably the stretch of Highway 99 at the entrance to the City.



COUNTY ROADS PROPOSED FOR SCENIC CORRIDOR PROTECTION

Several County roads in the rural portions of the County are notably scenic. These roads run through lands shown on the General Plan as Permanent Agriculture and Recreational. Zoning is almost entirely agricultural. These roads warrant scenic corridor protection. They are:

Scott Road from Highway 50 south to Latrobe Road

Latrobe Road

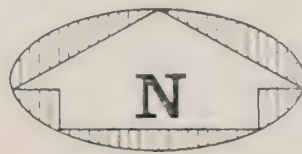
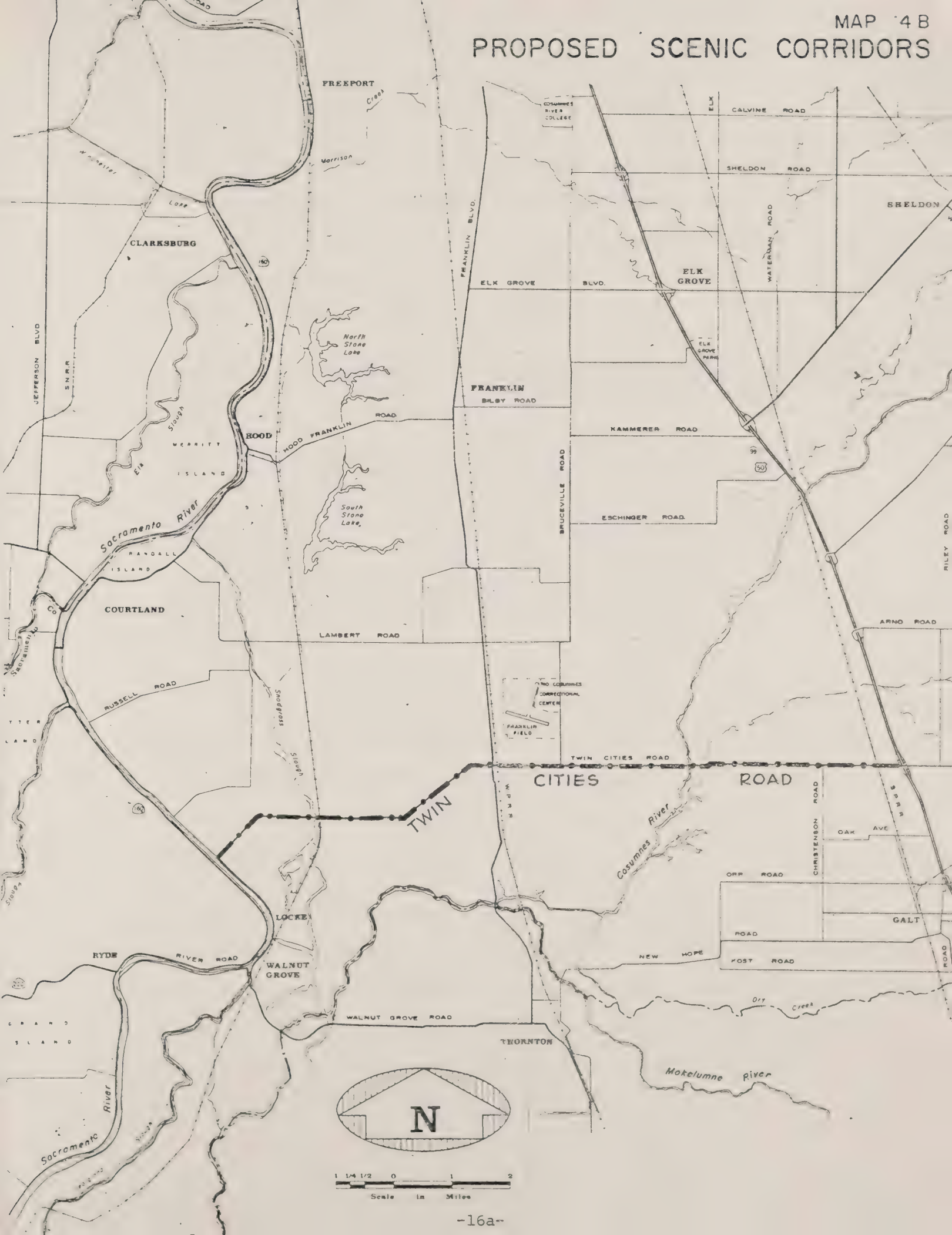
Michigan Bar Road

These three routes curve through the low foothills of the eastern part of the County. The view on both sides is grasslands and grazing cattle. Michigan Bar Road, especially, provides wide views as one tops the crests of the little knolls. The three roads are little used and in some cases pitted with chuck holes.

One additional road that warrants scenic corridor protection is Twin Cities Road from Highway 160 east to Highway 99. This road travels through heavily vegetated marshy land and the Cosumnes River area. It, like the three above, runs mostly through planned Permanent Agricultural land and is agriculturally zoned.



MAP 4B PROPOSED SCENIC CORRIDORS



1 1/2 0 1 2
Scale in Miles

THE GOLD RUSH PARKWAY PLAN AND URBAN DESIGN

The County has adopted the Gold Rush Parkway plan for a series of roads leading from downtown to the Gold Rush Country in Placer and El Dorado Counties. The major streets of the parkway in Sacramento County are H Street and Fair Oaks Boulevard.

The Plan describes the Parkway in the following terms:

The Gold Rush Parkway will be a scenic route that links the recreational, historic, and scenic features of the Sacramento Area with similar features in the Sierra foothills.

The Gold Rush Parkway, as a scenic drive, is intended to satisfy the desires of the many people in the Sacramento region and northern California who enjoy driving for pleasure and sightseeing. Driving for pleasure has been ranked as the most popular outdoor recreation activity in California by the State Department of Parks and Recreation. The Gold Rush Parkway will become a very popular scenic drive because it links a variety of points of interest for the recreational driver, including historic buildings and sites, important cultural facilities, recreation facilities for both day use and extended use, beautiful stretches of rivers and reservoirs, and a variety of attractive landscapes.

The Gold Rush Parkway Plan is in conflict with the goal of this element-- that of preserving the scenic qualities of routes without encouraging pleasure driving. The Gold Rush Parkway is expressly for the purpose of pleasure driving and, further, the Plan calls for discouragement of "destination oriented traffic."

It is important to note that the Plan as currently envisioned is also in conflict with the transportation goal recommended to the State Legislature by the California State Transportation Board in a report dated July 1, 1974. This goal is, in part, to develop a transportation system "of sufficient size and flexibility to accommodate all necessary trips but not be structured in such a way as to encourage unnecessary trips."

MAP 5
GOLD RUSH PARKWAY
IN SACRAMENTO COUNTY



Preservation and enhancement of urban aesthetics is a desirable goal, though not necessarily for the purpose of encouraging recreational driving. Beautification should be aimed at a much broader public than the Sunday driver. The people who live and work in an urban area, the bicyclist, the pedestrian, the bus rider, and automobile driver should all be considered in programs to preserve and enhance aesthetic urban design.

The County is currently investigating such programs with the intent of designating urban areas in the County where aesthetics should be given special consideration. Eventually, "Beautification Zones" or "Visual Impact Zones" will be designated. Sections of the proposed Gold Rush Parkway, or perhaps the whole of it, should be among those areas so designated because of their unique beauty and because they form a linkage between historical and recreation areas in the County. The Gold Rush Parkway Plan should be treated as one project within an overall program to preserve and enhance urban aesthetics.

Viewed in this way, the Parkway Plan should be modified to encompass multi-modal transportation needs. The route could be used for bus tours and bicycle trips between historical areas in the City of Sacramento-- Old Town, the Capitol, Sutter's Fort--and the historic and recreational areas of Folsom.

Other areas of the County associated with scenic routes would lend themselves to treatment as special beautification zones. These are the towns of the Delta along the River Road including Locke, Walnut Grove, Courtland, and other small communities. If attention were given to these towns, their special Delta flavor could be preserved to enhance the recreational values of the Delta.

POLICIES

In order to protect and enhance the scenic routes of Sacramento County, it is the policy of the County:

- 1) To strengthen the scenic corridor provisions of the Zoning Code to require design review of all signs and other structures within the corridor.
- 2) To identify sites for directional signs in the scenic corridors.
- 3) To fully enforce all sign controls in the scenic corridors.
- 4) To retain the scenic qualities of scenic corridors by avoiding unnecessary widening, straightening, or major reconstruction of scenic routes.
- 5) To provide additional access and parking sites for fishermen, picknickers, boaters, and sight-seers along the River Road.
- 6) To encourage a joint study by the Department of Water Resources, the State Reclamation Board, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to determine how the present strict requirements for levee stripping and burning can be revised to take into account aesthetic and environmental consideration.
- 7) To encourage the State Reclamation Board and the U.S. Corps of Engineers to riprap on levees only below the mean high tide level.
- 8) To undertake a study to determine the feasibility of historic preservation of Locke as a point of interest in the River Road.
- 9) To investigate the desirability of requesting the State to designate the Garden Highway as an Official County Scenic Highway.
- 10) To provide scenic corridor protection for Scott Road from Highway 50 south to Latrobe Road, Michigan Bar Road, and Twin Cities Road from Highway 160 east to Highway 99.
- 11) To encourage the State Division of Highways to landscape the freeways within Sacramento County, particularly stretches which form entrances to urban areas.
- 12) To reevaluate the Gold Rush Parkway Plan in order to de-emphasize encouragement of auto travel, to emphasize multi-modal transportation, and to integrate the Plan into an overall program of protecting and enhancing urban aesthetics within Sacramento County.
- 13) To study the desirability and feasibility of including the Delta communities along the River Road in a program of preserving and enhancing urban aesthetics of the County.

References and Notes

- (1) California Council on Intergovernmental Relations, General Plan Guidelines 1973.
- (2) Environmental Conservation and Resource Management Element of the 1973 Sacramento County General Plan, 1973.
- (3) California Resources Agency, Delta Master Recreation Plan, 1973 (updated and revised edition of the 1966 report).
- (4) Delta Area Planning Council, Draft Preliminary Summary, Delta Conservation and Development Plan, May, 1974.
- (5) California Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 151 (Cologne, Rodda, and Short), July 10, 1969.

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